

Company's lack of public safety plan causing concern

By Lisa Loveless-Mann

Times-Journal Reporter

Everyone admits that the chances of any serious danger resulting from the clean up of the Skinner Landfill are slim.

But Union Township officials want to make sure that if something goes wrong, they are among the first to know. Earthtech, the company responsible for the clean up, though, isn't cooperating as well as officials would like.

"This company is making no efforts to provide anyone off the site. Their response was 'That's your job,'" Township Administrator Dave Gully said at the trustees' last meeting. "What do we know about this kind of thing?"

Representatives from Earthtech gave the impression at a meeting held Feb. 2 at Union Elementary School to discuss the cleanup that they would notify the township in case of any problems.

"Now they have said that their responsibilities lie solely with their own workers," Trustee Catherine Stoker said.

Gully said that their employees will be protected with air monitors, decontamination chambers and "space suits." If air monitors detect a problem, the Environmental Protection Agency will be contacted by an automatic dialer.

"But my concern is that there are no monitoring devices for the post office, the day care center or the school," he said. All three are in the immediate vicinity of the landfill.

Fire Chief James Nathurgen said that he feels the department would be ready to handle

an emergency situation resulting from the cleanup and capping of the landfill, if they receive proper notification. A site-specific emergency plan has been developed and the fire department, police department, and county emergency agencies have been made familiar with it.

"If we get notification, we feel that we could substantially take care of any problem that might occur," he said.

"They (Earthtech) know that if there is a problem, we want to know about it," he said. He suggested that maybe the department's number also be automatically dialed, along with the EPA's, in case of any problems.

Stoker acknowledged that the township hire an independent consultant to ensure that the process is going as it should. Trustee Dave Tarnik suggested that the township place its own personnel on site, so they would be able to notify everyone if there was some kind of emergency.

Gully said that the company, and EPA, may not allow any township employees on site.

Ron Roelker, project manager for Earthtech, said that his company is doing what the U.S. EPA and the companies responsible for paying for the cleanup have told him they should do.

"Our job is to make sure that our workers are safe," he said. He said that there is not a general policy on how to handle an emergency situation and who to inform because everything is "project specific."

He said that he didn't recall anyone from Earthtech saying anything else at the meeting Feb. 2. He said he thought that an upcoming meeting with repre-

sentatives from Union Township, Earthtech and other involved parties had been scheduled.

Concerns about the cleanup are compounded with the alleged "disappearance" of official documents on the case from the Union Township Library.

The absence of the documents was initially noticed by resident Beth Haver, who has spoken to Union Township Police about her concerns.

Stoker accompanied her to the police department and they have since been told that the investigation is up to the library, unless they feel that items were actually stolen and want to make a report. (Please see SAFETY, Page A2)

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Lt. Joel Herzog of the Union Township Police said the police can not move forward and treat the case as a theft unless the library feels that a theft actually occurred. He said there is a good chance that the documents could have been misplaced or mistakenly thrown out.

"Someone could have made a mistake," he said. "I haven't seen any evidence that they were stolen."

He said that the primary objective now is to get the documents replaced so people have them available to see. He said that as far as he knew, it was the library's responsibility to have the documents available for citizens to see.

"I'm really concerned about what happened to these very important records," Hauer said. "We need these to know what is going on. We can protect people not by hoping for the best, but by planning for the worst."

Stoker said that some of the missing documents were vitally important. "I'm concerned about starting the cleanup without a risk evaluation assessment or the actual ROD (Record of Decision from the EPA)."

She said that three shelves of records have been reduced

to less than one. Another complete set of records should have been sent to the township as well, but they are not there, she said.

"Does the library understand their responsibility as the repository for important documents?" Trustee President Jose Alvarez asked.

Steve Mayhugh, branch manager of the library said that the library "is not the official holder of documents," and that it was the township's responsibility to do that. He said that the documents are currently at the library are all that had been there since he came 3-1/2 years ago.

He said that the policy on records like these is that they are not available to be checked out by the general public, and must be examined in the library. He said they are occasionally circulated for attorneys and organizations involved in the cases. He said

that he does not feel that anything was stolen.

"These missing records are an X-Files thing," Gully said. "They're not there, but officially, nothing's missing." He said that both the township and the library had requested complete sets of all official documents on the landfill.

Stoker said that she was concerned about all of the problems with the cleanup, and felt that the township should stay involved in the issue. "Someone from Chicago won't care about what happens here as much as we do," she said. "It's our responsibility to ensure that the chances of something bad happening are as small as possible."

Gully said that he was "not content" with Earthtech's or the EPA's response to his concerns and said that he had been in contact with U.S. Representative John Boehner's office about the issue.

"This is a class government of town, and trying aside," he said. "I fully expect to rise and do their thing they want to, as going to sit back happen."

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